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ABSTRACT

Ten guidelines for establishing preschool programs in the public schools are discussed in terms of premises and suggestions. It is asserted that public school-based programs for black, preschool-age children should: (1) incorporate an effective parent education program; (2) involve parents in decisions about curriculum and policy; (3) include teachers from the community served by the program who are racially and ethnically representative of the children served; (4) be required to offer training in preschool education or in-service training provided by qualified staff; (5) have a curriculum that is culturally sensitive and appropriate to the child's age and level of development; (6) be housed in schools that meet health and safety standards that apply to independent preschools and center-based child care programs; (7) participate in federal and state programs which guarantee adequate nutrition to children; (8) ensure that children who enter the programs have access to appropriate health care; (9) not limit their assessment of children to, or base their program planning solely on, standardized tests; and (10) be subject to a regular, external review by community members and early childhood development experts. A reference list, names and addresses of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) Advisory Committee on Child Care and information about NBCDI complete the guide. (RH)

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SAFEGUARDS

Guidelines for Establishing Programs for Four-Year-Olds in the Public Schools

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SAFEGUARDS

Guidelines for Establishing Child Development Programs
for Four Year Olds in the Public Schools

The National Black Child Development Institute, Inc.
Washington, D.C.

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FOREWORD

We are grateful to the members of NBCDI's National Advisory Committee on Child Care, who are substantially responsible for the content of this document; Barbara Huell, NBCDI Child Care Consultant, who spent a year working with the Advisory Committee to capture and expand upon their ideas; Carla Curtis, former NBCDI Public Policy Analyst for Child Care, who monitored the development of these guidelines; and all of our constituents who contributed to *Safeguards*.

However, true success will only occur if this document is actually utilized by administrators in planning programs, by program staff in implementing programs, and by parents and advocacy groups in evaluating programs. Let us all work to ensure that early childhood education programs in the public schools realize their full potential to enhance the education and development of Black children.

Evelyn K. Moore, Executive Director
National Black Child Development Institute
August 1987

THE TEN SAFEGUARDS

The First Safeguard. *Public school-based programs for Black, preschool-age children should incorporate an effective parent education program.*

The Second Safeguard. *Public school-based early childhood programs should involve parents in the decisions about the curriculum and policy.*

The Third Safeguard. *The staff of early childhood education programs should include teachers who come from the community served by the program and who are racially and ethnically representative of the children served.*

The Fourth Safeguard. *Teachers in public school-based programs should be required to have specific training in preschool education and/or ongoing, inservice training provided by qualified staff.*

The Fifth Safeguard. *Curriculum for preschool-age children in the public schools should be culturally sensitive and appropriate to the child's age and level of development.*

The Sixth Safeguard. *Public schools which house programs for very young children should meet the same health and safety standards which apply to independent preschools and center-based child care programs.*

The Seventh Safeguard. *Public school-based early childhood programs should participate in federal and state programs which guarantee adequate nutrition to children.*

The Eighth Safeguard. *Administrators of public school-based programs for preschoolers should ensure that children entering the programs have access to appropriate health care.*

The Ninth Safeguard. *In assessing children of preschool age, the administrators of public school-based early childhood programs should not limit their assessment to, or base their program planning solely on, standardized tests.*

The Tenth Safeguard. *Public school-based early childhood programs should be subject to a regular, external review by community members and early childhood development experts.*

SAFEGUARDS

As public schools become a major provider of early childhood education and care, we can expect large numbers of Black children to use these programs for at least three reasons. First, most public schools that have begun early education programs already have large enrollments of Black children because the focus has been on "at risk" children, a large majority of whom are Black. Second, 67 percent of all Black mothers work in the labor pool; as this percentage increases, the need for child care becomes greater. Third, many Black parents want their children to have an educational advantage which they feel will result from the children's participation in early education programs. For economic reasons, their choices will be public school programs where services tend to be free or on a sliding scale.

The National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) has a record of support for the public schools and their teachers. As advocates for Black children, such support is mandatory—because it is here that the vast majority of Black students will be found long into the 21st Century. Still, as the public school systems add to their responsibilities the needs of yet another constituent—the very young, it is incumbent upon us to address some concerns to which this trend has given rise. These concerns emerge from past public policy in general and from trends in education which have drastically affected the lives of countless Black children. In many of our nation's cities, Blacks have inherited the failures of public policy: decrepit housing, inadequate public services, and empty municipal coffers.

In urban public schools across this nation, Blacks stand to inherit institutions and programs taxed beyond their limits. Rural and city schools alike are already struggling under the weight of their charge: to do more with less money.

We are not without sympathy for problems faced by many of our nation's public schools: underfinancing, shortages of new teachers, and the public's perception of the schools as the panacea for all unresolved social problems ranging from juvenile delinquency to teenage pregnancy. We recognize and commend

individuals in various sections of the country who struggle daily for high quality programs for Black children, but they must be joined by many others to create the national imperative required to change a still inadequate educational achievement record.

For as we look at the progress of the public school system relative to Black children, the statistics are alarming. Today, 40 percent of minority youth are functionally illiterate. Black children are twice as likely to be suspended from school or to suffer corporal punishment. Eighty percent of those suspended from public schools are Black boys. Dr. Asa Hilliard, Professor of Urban Education at Georgia State University and former NBCDI Board Member, notes, "There are more Black children placed in Educable Mentally Retarded [EMR] programs than Whites nationwide." Black children make up 40 percent of EMR students, although they are only slightly more than 10 percent of the population.

The problems faced by the public education systems must be scrutinized from many different viewpoints if viable solutions are to be found. School systems need help, and advocates for children must assist by providing necessary support. The ten safeguards detailed herein offer clear and direct suggestions for ways of ensuring that early education programs in the public schools create a learning environment for Black children which is productive, effective and long lasting in positive outcomes.

The First Safeguard

Public school-based programs for Black, preschool-age children should incorporate an effective parent education program.

Premise

There must be continuity in learning both at home and at school in order to enhance the children's development and maximize their learning experiences. Thus, parents should be recognized as partners in the educative process. Schools should provide opportunities for parents to learn more about their children's development, about how and what the schools teach,

about what parents can do at home to extend and support their children's learning, and about how they could make their parenting roles more effective.

Suggestions

1. School districts should hire, as part of the child care staff, personnel specially designated to organize a parent education component. Programs with small numbers of children in the same district could share such personnel. These individuals should have training in child development, have the ability to establish good rapport with diverse groups of parents, and have the creativity and skills to develop a wide spectrum of parent-oriented activities.

   - Activities should be conducted in an atmosphere of welcome, sensitivity, and professionalism. They should grow out of both the professional knowledge of school staff and from the interests and needs of the parents. Special consideration should be given to programs for fathers, teen parents, and parents of the handicapped.

   - Participation in parent education programs should be on a voluntary basis. Incentives for participation would be essential, however. For example, an award system for consistent attendance could be instituted. Points could be assigned for each activity and certificates issued when the maximum points have been received; the parents themselves or the whole class with the most parents in attendance could be recognized. Partnerships between the child development program and local businesses could be developed. Businesses could offer specific rewards to the entire child development program in honor of parents with more consistent parent education participation.

2. Parent education centers should be established, at least on a district-wide basis and, at minimum, should include the following:

   - a toy and book lending library,

- videotaped series on child care and development, and on other topics of concern and benefit to parents,
- facilities and materials for parents to learn how to effectively use low-cost learning materials for children's at-home learning,
- updated television guides prepared to assist parents in critical review of shows for children, to offer discussion points and techniques for dialogue between parents and children about TV shows, and to help parents help children watch television more educationally,
- guides for selecting appropriate home video movies,
- and various material and resource guides such as *Beyond the Stereotypes: A Guide to Resources for Black Girls and Young Women*, published by the National Black Child Development Institute.

The Second Safeguard

Public school-based early childhood programs should involve parents in the decisions about the curriculum and policy.

Premise

Parents are the largest, single group of advocates for children and for programs which serve their children. Their involvement in the school-based program is critical to the success of the program. More importantly, the involvement of parents in their children's early education program does the following: (1) extends their own education about the school programs, about child development, and about local and state child care policies, (2) helps make the school program more accountable to them, (3) helps their children to feel that crucial link which should exist between school and home and between teacher and parent, and (4) gives them a sense of power to effect change, an attitude without which parent involvement is often reduced to non-essential activities.

Suggestions

1. The entire school atmosphere as well as organized activities should reflect respect for and welcome to parents at all times. Parents should know they can visit the school at all times, and every effort should be made to make parents feel part of the total program, erasing the air of intimidation and rejection that is often felt in public schools.

2. A Parent Advisory Group should be established at each child development site. This group should meet on a regular basis with the center director and other key staff members to learn about the operations of the program, to help in recruiting volunteers, to be instrumental in developing and reviewing policies and procedural guidelines, to hear staff reports and needs, and to help mediate grievances registered by parents which relate to discipline or other issues affecting the children. The Parent Advisory Group should advise staff on the methods and substance of parent education and parent involvement activities.

   - This group should be a liaison between the school program and other parents, between the school and the private sector, and between the school program and trustees of the school district.
   - The group could initiate long- and short-term partnerships between businesses and civic/religious organizations in order to receive various kinds of support.
   - Service on the Parent Advisory Group should be on a rotating basis with staggered terms.
   - Minutes of Parent Advisory Group meetings should be posted in conspicuous public announcement areas at the school site and should be sent to local school trustees.

3. There should be a standing parent committee for curriculum. This group should be encouraged to observe the developmental aspects of the program, meet periodically with the teachers and staff to learn more about what the

school offers and to register their concerns about the curricular needs of their children, and help list and address improvements that are needed to fully execute the curriculum.

4. All programs should have a well-organized parent involvement plan. The plan should provide for parent involvement in day-to-day activities of the program as grade mothers and fathers, as facilitators of special events, at holidays or other special occasions, as volunteer staff, and in a variety of other ways.

   - Such a plan could be developed by the staff person responsible for parent education in conjunction with the Parent Advisory Group.
   - The plan should outline, with special emphasis, the involvement of fathers and other males (older brothers, uncles, guardians) with whom children may live and have constant contact, grandparents, and teenage parents.
   - Upon enrolling their children, new parents should be expected to choose, from a variety of suggestions, the manner in which they can become involved in the school program given their own interests, time, and other responsibilities.

5. Parents should be given active roles in the review and evaluation of the total program. Utilizing concise checklists, parents could be asked annually to supply the center with their opinions about the center operations, including items on interactions between staff and children, interactions between staff and parents, curriculum, and all other major program components. Parents should also be represented on the Annual External Review Team. (This will be discussed more under The Tenth Safeguard.)

The Third Safeguard

The staff of early childhood education programs should include teachers who come from the community served by the program and who are racially and ethnically representative of the children served.

Premise

Children need role models in the learning environment who are representative of their racial and ethnic makeup. It is often through these role models that children's personal aspirations and goals are set for life. While efficient staff members almost invariably receive respect from parents, Black parents are often more comfortable in settings where there is an adequate mix of staff by racial and ethnic origin and, more importantly, where their own race is represented in key positions. There need to be special efforts to attract Blacks to administrative and leadership positions to assure that at all levels of the child care program, there are individuals with whom the children and their parents can identify.

Suggestions

1. School districts should form partnerships with nearby universities to retrain and credential Blacks who would qualify for key staff positions.
2. Districts should develop internship programs for attracting and training community people as potential child care staff.
3. School districts should develop and maintain an active recruitment and retention program to attract and keep highly qualified Black staff in the early education program.

The Fourth Safeguard

Teachers in public school-based programs should be required to have specific training in preschool education and/or ongoing, inservice training provided by qualified staff.

Premise

The skills of the center teachers are key determinants of the quality of the school and of how and what the children learn. The creation of the entire learning atmosphere is largely dependent upon the teacher. Therefore, schools should employ highly trained individuals for these positions.

Suggestions

1. Center directors should have a Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education or, in addition to a degree in Elementary Education or a related field, must have completed coursework in Early Childhood Education equivalent to Child Development Associate (CDA) training or equivalent to the requirements of the local or state department of education, which ever is higher. Directors should also have previous experience in child development and training in management and staff-parent relations.
2. Teachers should have at minimum a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Early Childhood Education, or a degree in a related field with a completion of certification courses required by the local or state department of education or CDA credentialing, or a combination of both if CDA provides more rigorous standards.
3. At least every three years, recertification should be required in order to help teachers keep abreast of changing trends and improvements in the field.
4. For principals at the public schools where programs for four year olds are located, there should be provisions made for basic traïning in Early Childhood Education. There

should also be proper orientation of other school personnel including lunchroom workers, aides, and guidance counselors. Staff development seminars at the district level could provide such orientation. Local colleges and technical schools could provide basic Child Development courses.

5. Every attempt should be made to make use of the experience of private day care personnel and other community day care workers. When qualified, these individuals should be given consideration as staff. Their training and/or recertification could be facilitated by utilizing CDA credentialing and/or by local school district staff development programs which are certified by the local or state department of education.

6. All districts should have an ongoing, inservice training program implemented by the center director and/or in conjunction with a larger, district-wide staff development program. This should include seminars, visits to other child development programs and classrooms—inter- and intra-district, access to resource materials and to college and technical schools offering coursework in Early Childhood Education and related field study, and videotaped sessions featuring the center staff and followed up by a constructive, critical sharing and evaluation component.

7. Home visits by teachers and center directors should be required. An integral part of children's learning is their own environment. Teachers and other center staff need to learn more about and have an appreciation for the homes and environment from which their children come.

8. Teachers should have coursework in Black History and Culture so that they will be better prepared to teach Black children and show appreciation for their cultural heritage.

The Fifth Safeguard

Curriculum for preschool-age children in the public schools should be culturally sensitive and appropriate to the child's age and level of development.

Premise

"A major determinant of the quality of an early childhood program is the degree to which the program is developmentally appropriate. . . ." (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1986) Curriculum for four year olds should not be a watered-down version of the first grade. Rather, it should reflect an "appreciation and enjoyment" of the "energy" of the four year olds, "their imagination, their curiosity, their sociability, their creativity. It must be understood that the goal of [the four year old's] school is to nourish these strengths, not to dampen them." (Hymes, 1986)

In addition to what is good for all young children, programs must be aware of special needs for Black children. "Since preschool is usually the first socializing experience a child encounters outside the home, programs must be especially sensitive to ensure that the socialization process will enhance the child's self-esteem," emphasize the parents' positive values, and reflect a respect for the heritage of the Black community. Therefore, curriculum must be carefully developed to both incorporate a sensitivity to Black cultural values and to encourage as much parent participation as possible. (Moore, 1982) Respecting one's own differences, having pride in one's roots, and recognizing value in the uniqueness of one's cultural heritage are critical to producing self-assured, confident, and competent individuals. Such attitudes must be nurtured in the early education programs.

Suggestions

1. Curriculum should reflect all that experts know to be developmentally wise for young children and should take into

serious consideration identifiable strengths which children bring to the program and recognized stages of growth and development:

- There should be a variety of activities in which the children may choose to participate.
- Necessary, routine activities should be comfortably built into the daily schedule.
- There should be some flexibility in the routine and daily schedule to allow for constructive spontaneity in experiences, group mood and energy level changes, and changes in weather.
- The schedule should be well-balanced with provisions for both teacher- and child-oriented activities, taking into account the personality, interests, and varied strengths of individual children. Each day should be designed to facilitate cognitive, social, physical, cultural, and emotional development.
- Learning should be active, not passive. Children should be allowed to learn through discovery. (Adequate supervision is necessary for this to happen.) Additional information on appropriate curricula for four year olds may be found in *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Programs for Four and Five Year Olds*, published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

2. Each day in the class, there should be evidence of consistent, positive acknowledgement and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Black children through the use of well-chosen visual aids, books, records, and other learning material. The National Black Child Development Institute's publication, *Beyond the Stereotypes*, is an invaluable resource guide to help identify and locate such aids.
3. Teachers should impart to children positive values consistent with those taught in their homes. They should expect and teach appropriate behavior and nurture in the children a positive self-concept and respect for their environment.

4. There should be appropriate modification in the curriculum in order to meet the needs of the physically, emotionally, or mentally handicapped. Mainstreaming should be encouraged when possible, and alternative care should be provided when special needs are determined.
5. The ratio of teachers/staff to children should allow for appropriate group and individualized play and learning. The ratio should, at minimum, meet state guidelines for child care centers.

The Sixth Safeguard

Public schools which house programs for very young children should meet the same health and safety standards which apply to independent preschools and center-based child care programs.

Premise

A healthy, safe environment is critical to the success of the child care program. Adequate provisions must be made to prevent or address physical illness in children; adjustments to the regular public school facility may be necessary to allow for the maximum safety of young children while learning and at play. Certain procedures must be outlined to provide for hiring healthy staff, without whom a good program cannot be effected.

Suggestions

1. There should be written health records maintained on each child, with documented health evaluations, immunizations, and other necessary information obtained at least three months prior to enrollment. Within at least thirty days of enrollment, all children should be given a health assessment with proper immunizations being given if found lacking.
2. Staff and parents should be aware of procedures to notify parents when their children are sick, and policies should

be established governing the attendance or suspended attendance of children who are ill.

3. Children should be under adult supervision at all times, and staff should be constantly alert to their health conditions.
   - Deviations in the general health of the child and all accidents should be reported to other staff and parents immediately.
   - Caregivers should constantly be on guard for signs of neglect and abuse among children in the center. Should evidence of either be detected, referrals should be made to the appropriate agencies.
4. There should be policies insuring the release of children to authorized individuals.
5. Each center should require annual checkups of caregivers which test for communicable diseases. Psychological evaluations and observations should also be required.
6. New staff members should serve probationary periods during which their physical and psychological competence is judged for work with young children.
7. There should be written plans for handling health, fire, and other emergencies.
   - At least one staff member should on hand at all times who is certified by a licensed health agency in first aid and emergency treatments such as CPR. Likewise, first aid supplies should be readily available.
   - There should be restrictive guidelines for dispensing medicine to children.
8. District staff and/or designated local center staff should establish close rapport with local and state health agency personnel in order to institute a ready referral system for children. The school will then be able to actually assist parents in obtaining necessary health services.

9. The physical facility should be clean at all times with equipment kept in good repair.
10. The state's minimum space requirements should be met to insure appropriate play and learning space for four year olds.
11. Adults should always practice good personal hygiene.

The Seventh Safeguard

Public school-based early childhood programs should participate in federal and state programs which guarantee adequate nutrition to children.

Premise

Good performance in school and a well-adjusted school experience depend in part on a well-nourished, healthy body. Mealtime at the centers is also an important learning experience for the children; good table manners, proper food selection, and social development are fostered. It is also a good opportunity for parents to visit, interact with staff and children, as well as learn more about nutrition.

Suggestions

1. The premises for food preparation and service should meet local and state health and sanitation guidelines.
2. Breakfast, snacks, and lunch should be standard to early education programs that operate the full school day. At minimum, half-day programs should offer lunch and one snack.
3. Family style meals, with children learning to serve themselves under adult supervision, are highly desirable.
4. Parents should be given information on daily and weekly menus and encouraged to visit and eat with staff and children.

The Eighth Safeguard

Administrators of public school-based programs for preschoolers should ensure that children entering the programs have access to appropriate health care.

Premise

Healthy children make better and happier learners. It is part of the center's responsibility to help each family secure adequate health care. It is equally important that the center develop and execute certain health care procedures for center staff and children.

Suggestions

1. There should be specially designated staff responsible for health referral services:
   - This individual could be the school's guidance counselor who has received Early Childhood Education orientation, the center director, and/or the person responsible for parent education.
   - An established rapport should exist between local and state health agencies and the designated staff in order to institute a ready referral system.
   - As much as is possible, necessary and updated forms should be in the office of the center.
   - The individual responsible for health care referrals should keep in mind that often to maintain the health of a child, the health of other family members may be of importance to the center staff. Designated staff need to have a wide range of knowledge about services available to the children and to their families.
   - The center staff person should be responsible for efficient follow-up to all referrals.

2. When existing or potential health care problems warrant it, certain health officials may be invited to the schools to speak to parents or may be encouraged to develop and distribute, along with other center information, important health care facts, ideas, and procedures which may benefit children and their families.

The Ninth Safeguard

In assessing children of preschool age, the administrators of public school-based early childhood programs should not limit their assessment to, or base their program planning solely on, standardized tests.

Premise

Standardized tests should not be used to assess the needs of four year olds. Dr. Asa Hilliard strongly advises child care staff to first ask why assessment is necessary. He cautions that there is no need for standardized testing of four year olds. Dr. James L. Hymes argues that ". . . important negatives [should] be clearly understood by all: no report cards, no achievement test, no retention, no homework, no workbooks." The National Black Child Development Institute concurs with their thinking. Assessment is valuable when its purpose is to facilitate individualized learning experiences and to help staff better create the most conducive learning environment possible. Assessment should never be used to determine entry or graduation and should not be used to stereotype children, determine classroom composition, or track students into narrowly defined academic learning tracts in later school life.

Suggestions

1. Through inservice training, teachers should be clear on the reasons for assessing children.
2. An appropriate variety of assessment tools should then be decided upon and made use of:

- anecdotal records,
- play and learning environment observation checklists which are prepared by national or local professionals,
- case studies, and
- dated and carefully recorded journal entries on the children's activities and work.

3. All assessments should be shared with parents. Parents should be given the opportunity to comment on the teacher's evaluation as well as share their own view of the children's needs and progress.

The Tenth Safeguard

Public school-based early childhood programs should be subject to a regular, external review by community members and early childhood development experts.

Premise

Periodic review by individuals and groups independent of the child care center and in conjunction with center staff and district personnel will help achieve consistently high-quality programs. Systematic, constructive, and objective assessment of the center's goals and objectives and other major components should provide staff and the school district with information on how others view the program and on whether written expectations are being met. Such reviews allow for appropriate adjustments in programming where needed. The community input derived from the review helps to solidify the center's status in the community and helps to garner respect and support. Program staff also could benefit immensely from the involvement of professionals on the state and national levels and from advocates for children.

Suggestions

1. Each center should identify a group of individuals who will serve as an External Review Committee.
   - The committee should be composed of community laymen, professional district staff, state department of education representatives, parent advisory committee representatives, and members of advocacy organizations such as the local affiliate of the National Black Child Development Institute.
   - At least bi-annually, the External Review Committee should spend a specified number of days in the district to visit centers, meet with staff and district personnel, and observe the learning and support systems of the center in order to make candid and thorough assessments.
2. The center staff and the External Review Committee should decide upon an evaluation instrument. It should provide for assessment of all major program components and for the identification of needed improvements.
3. Written reports and/or conferences with center and district staff should ensue.

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NATIONAL BLACK CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHILD CARE

Barbara Bowman
Director of Graduate Studies
Erikson Institute
25 West Chicago Avenue
Chicago, IL 60610

Dwayne Crompton
Executive Director
KCMC Child Development Corp.
1800 East Truman
Kansas City, MO 64127

John R. Dill
Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs
Memphis State University
Memphis, TN 38152

Karen Hill-Scott
Executive Director
Crystal Stairs, Inc.
101 North La Brea Avenue
Suite 100
Inglewood, CA 90301

Barbara Huell
Child Care Consultant
P. O. Box 870
Georgetown, SC 29442

Carol Phillips
Executive Director
Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition
1341 G Street, N.W., Suite 802
Washington, DC 20005

Carole Quarterman
Executive Director
Child Care Coordinating Council of Detroit
5031 Grandy
Detroit, MI 48211

Helen Taylor
Executive Director
National Child Day Care Association
1501 Benning Road, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002

ABOUT NBCDI

The National Black Child Development Institute was established in 1970 to improve the quality of life for Black children and youth. A national, nonprofit, charitable, and educational organization, NBCDI focuses on the issues of health, education, child welfare, and child care. NBCDI is composed of dedicated volunteers who help to educate their communities about national, state, and local issues facing Black children and youth. NBCDI's public education component is implemented through our quarterly newsletter, periodic updates, publications, and the annual conference.

NBCDI's affiliate network serves as a catalyst for change on the local level. Affiliates engage in a variety of program activities beneficial to Black children and youth. For example, they have addressed the issue of competency testing, tutored children and youth, and provided leadership training through conferences and workshops. Membership in NBCDI is open to all interested persons.